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Chairman: Mr. Ashiri (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Japan)

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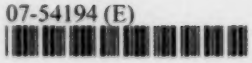

In the absence of Mr. Wolf (Jamaica), Mr. Ashiri (Japan), Vice-Chairman, took the chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 63: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/62/38, A/62/177, A/62/202 and A/62/290)

(a) Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/62/173, A/62/201 and A/62/188)

(b) Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (*continued*)(A/62/178)

1. **Ms. Lowe** (New Zealand), speaking on behalf of Canada, Australia and New Zealand, said that Member States should continue working towards a strengthened, coherent gender architecture for gender equality and the empowerment of women in all entities of the United Nations system. She welcomed further discussion on progress towards the implementation of the Secretary-General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women (A/61/122/Add.1 and Corr.1), noting the General Assembly's important role in ensuring that meaningful follow-up was undertaken by the various stakeholders.

2. Reaffirming her country's commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (A/62/178) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, she said that the international standards laid down in them were a constant benchmark for the fulfilment of women's rights. Those Member States which had not ratified the Convention should give ratification serious consideration and continue work on implementing Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

3. **Ms. Khvan** (Russian Federation) said that her delegation supported the Organization's approach to gender issues overall, but believed that action should focus on areas where hidden or overt discrimination persisted, particularly in the economic and political spheres. Although the fragmented nature of the existing gender architecture did lead to duplication of work, the Russian Federation was not convinced that a new body was needed. The issue required further study and broad consultations.

4. The Russian Federation welcomed the outcome of the fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The constructive spirit of the deliberations boded well for the Commission's reform process. The advancement of women in decision-making was a topical issue, including for the Russian Federation. Women headed two of the most important federal ministries: the Ministry of Health and Social Development and the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. The governor of the key constituency of St. Petersburg was also female. A number of women occupied posts as deputy ministers and State Secretaries, and the representation of women at the regional executive level was much greater.

5. The Government was prioritizing the realization of full gender equality and had established a Commission on Gender Equality in 2006 to that end. That body had approved the national gender strategy, which aimed to achieve equality in the social, economic, educational and cultural fields. A project for introducing gender-based approaches was being developed in line with agreed international instruments and with the help of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for the Academy of Public Administration. Lastly, her country would continue its active work in the Commission on the Status of Women aimed at ensuring further reform, updating its agenda and enhancing its effectiveness.

6. **Mr. Sen** (Turkey) said that the elimination of discrimination against women and the strengthening of gender equality were among his Government's main priorities. To that end, Turkey had been taking serious legal and administrative measures, including the Ninth Development Plan for 2007-2013, which placed special emphasis on education, training and employment opportunities for women. In the last general elections, 48 women had been elected to Parliament. Although that figure was far from satisfactory, it reflected a significant increase compared to the previous term.

7. Turkey had hosted two important meetings on the rights of women in 2006: the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on "Strengthening the role of women in society", held on 14-15 November in Istanbul, which adopted a Framework of Action; and the First Ministerial Conference on Women's Role in the Development of Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Member States, held on 20-21 November in Istanbul. Those two conferences, which had brought together representatives from

various States and regions, as well as from international governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), had made an important contribution towards the advancement of women throughout a large geographical area.

8. **Mr. Acharya** (India) said that the focus after the 2005 World Summit had rightly shifted to the identification of sources for funding gender programmes. While the primary responsibility for that lay with the country concerned, the international community should live up to its commitment by providing new and additional financial resources, as well as transferring technology and sharing of expertise. There was an urgent need for legislative and policy measures to ensure the greater empowerment of women and to address the continued violation of the rights of the girl child.

9. The lack of knowledge among senior managers in the United Nations system, including resident coordinators, about ways to operationalize gender mainstreaming policies was a matter of concern. It was vital to achieve 50/50 gender distribution in the United Nations, especially at senior and policymaking levels, and the Government of India supported the strengthening of gender mainstreaming accountability frameworks.

10. Gender equity and equality had been a key guiding principle of the National Common Minimum Programme of the Government of India. In 2005, the former Department for Women and Child Development had been upgraded to a Ministry. Furthermore, the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women continued to play a crucial role in monitoring the application of gender equality principles in legislation. The reservation of one third of urban and local self-government seats for women had also marked a turning point in India's efforts to empower women. In order to reduce the female poverty ratio by 5 per cent by 2007 and 15 per cent by 2012, a number of results-oriented programmes had been initiated in India, including a National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme and initiatives to set up women's self-help groups.

11. Government initiatives for gender equality had been backed up by the higher judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court of India, which had addressed issues of concern to women in several ways. Another crucial step in gender mainstreaming had been the institutionalization of gender-sensitive budgeting. In 2005, the Indian Parliament had enacted the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, marking a milestone in that area. Lastly, India looked forward to the Secretary-General's global campaign on violence against women, to be launched towards the end of 2007 (A/62/201) and was also honoured to have sent the first Female Formed Police Unit to the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

12. **Mr. Petranto** (Indonesia) said that violence against women remained one of the most persistent human rights violations and that it was distressing that a culture of impunity still existed in many parts of the world. The growing number of women migrant workers, who made up almost half of all migrants worldwide, had brought the issue of gender violence to the fore. Only recently had policymakers recognized the particular challenges faced by women migrants, who were subjected to violence, discrimination, exploitation and abuse. It was the obligation of States to guarantee the rights of those workers and to incorporate preventive, anti-discrimination measures into their policies. Cooperation between sending and receiving countries should be constantly reviewed.

13. It was essential that the United Nations reform process should include a strengthening of the gender architecture within the system and enhance national efforts to implement comprehensive approaches towards the advancement of women. In that respect, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) had played an important role.

14. At the national level, Indonesia had always placed a high priority on respect for and the promotion of women's rights in its legislation. The most significant recent measure had been the passing of Law No. 23 of 2004 on the elimination of domestic violence. At the 116th Parliamentary Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, held in Bali in May 2007, it had been active in integrating gender issues into the discussions. The United Nations Climate Change Conference was due to be held in Bali in December 2007 and would provide an opportunity to address the issue of women's vulnerability. The delegation of Indonesia urged all stakeholders to incorporate gender considerations into national and international policies and programmes on climate change.

15. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nassar** (Observer for Palestine) said that 2007 marked the fortieth year of Israeli military occupation in the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The occupation had placed a particularly heavy burden on Palestinian women who struggled daily to ensure the well-being of their families. Palestinian women continued to face a unique and tragic situation that required the attention of the international community. Not only did they have to fight to achieve their inalienable human rights and freedom, but they also had to strive alongside the women of the world to play an active and effective role in their own society. Although the Palestinian Authority had established a Ministry for Women's Affairs, the Israeli occupation remained the major obstacle to women's social, economic and political advancement.

16. Israel's military assaults and raids on civilian areas in the Occupied Palestinian Territory had caused the displacement and homelessness of Palestinian women and their families, affecting all aspects of their lives and their ability to contribute positively to their society. The situation was particularly dire in the Gaza Strip, where 90 per cent of the besieged population lives under the poverty level. Urgent attention and assistance must be given to the people in the devastated Gaza Strip, especially the women, children and elderly, as they were the most vulnerable members of society.

17. The Palestinian people wanted peace and looked to the international community and international law as the guarantors of the peace to which they aspired. She wished to convey Palestine's deep gratitude to all the United Nations agencies and programmes and the many international organizations which continued to provide valuable and much-needed assistance to Palestinian women and their families.

18. **Ms. Sow** (Senegal) said that it was widely acknowledged that poverty was particularly acute among women in developing countries, especially in Africa. Women were the victims of all manner of discrimination, which hampered their social and political development. That included the persistence of sexist stereotypes, violence and abuse, and the tendency of families to marginalize pregnant teenagers or unmarried mothers. The few improvements made to their legal and social status only affected an educated minority of women.

19. Senegal had therefore adopted a number of economic and social strategies to respond to women's needs. They focused, for instance, on protecting pregnant teenagers and unmarried mothers, cutting maternal mortality by half, taking robust action to protect women against HIV/AIDS, spacing births to cut infant mortality, providing broader access to programmes to lighten the work of women, promoting savings, protecting women from sexual abuse and family violence, and increasing women's rights within the family.

20. At the institutional level, Senegal had taken account of the cross-cutting nature of the family in all its development programmes. It had also set itself the goal of helping women and providing optimal social assistance. Without political determination and stability, democracy and national solidarity, Senegal would not have been able to make such progress in the advancement of women. The effective promotion of gender equality could be achieved with the political commitment of all African leaders. An illustration of that had been the inclusion of gender-specific issues in the programme of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

21. **Ms. Makhumula** (Malawi) said that the majority of women in Malawi lived in rural areas. Women accounted for 70 per cent of all agricultural work and 80 per cent of food production for domestic consumption. The empowerment of women was a strong component of Malawi's poverty reduction efforts, with the Government committed to strengthening women's access to land and microcredit. The elimination of all forms of discrimination against women was a prerequisite for implementing the Millennium Development Goals as well as the country's own Growth and Development Strategy.

22. Efforts were under way to ensure the domestic incorporation of the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women were proving a useful tool in that regard. Her delegation endorsed the proposal to further expand the treaty monitoring body's working time. The International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) should step up its efforts in providing high quality research on women's issues and raising the Institute's relevance

and visibility. The lack of data on the situation of rural women was a particular cause for concern.

23. Her Government recognized the importance of maintaining sustained action and devising more innovative strategies to increase the representation of women in male-dominated decision-making. Education remained the key for empowering women and shifting societal attitudes in that regard. Efforts continued to be made to ensure the equal access of girls and young women to all levels of education and to encourage girls to return to school after pregnancy. Women's health care was being strengthened, with more women accessing antenatal, postnatal and family planning services in both State and mission hospitals, as well as antiretroviral treatment. The country remained challenged, however, by the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS and a high maternal mortality rate of 984 deaths per 100,000 live births. A five-year national "road map" for the reduction of maternal mortality had been devised with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

24. Malawi continued to make progress in combating violence against women. Victim support clinics had been established in police stations to encourage more women to report gender-based violence, thus helping to track perpetrators. Shelters provided counselling, vocational training and grants for business start-up. Legislation on the prevention of domestic violence had also been promulgated. Lastly, Malawi remained committed to the advancement of women and gender equality and looked forward to increased international cooperation on the issue.

25. **Ms. Myo** (Myanmar) said that equal rights and equal participation of women in political, social, cultural and economic life were indispensable to the sustainable development of nations. She was pleased to report that girls enjoyed the same rights as boys in Myanmar's co-education system. The enrolment rate of girls at the primary and secondary levels was no less than for boys, while at the tertiary level, female students predominated. In the health sector, Government ministries were working with local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the United Nations system towards the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, and a programme had been launched to prevent mother-to-child transmission.

26. A national plan of action had been in place since 1996 to combat trafficking in persons and anti-trafficking legislation enacted in 2005 covered sexual exploitation, forced labour and slavery. Penalties ranged from a 10-year minimum sentence to life imprisonment. In Myanmar, sexual exploitation of women and girls was traditionally abhorred and all cases duly investigated. Perpetrators of torture and sexual violence were liable to 5 to 20 years imprisonment with hard labour.

27. In recent years, accusations of gang rape had been levelled against some Myanmar military personnel based on unfounded reports issued by anti-government and expatriate NGOs such as the Shan Women's Action Network, the Shan Human Rights Foundation and the Kareni Human Rights Group. Those far-fetched accusations had been repeated by so-called human rights organizations as part of a disinformation campaign against a sovereign country. Unscrupulous groups would go to any length to exploit the sensitive issue of violation against women. Lastly, international cooperation was essential to assisting developing countries in their efforts to advance the status of women. Her delegation thus called upon the international community to increase the level of official development assistance, especially for health and education.

28. **Ms. Al-Kasadi** (Yemen) said that, in the years since national unification in 1990, Yemen had seen many political, economic and cultural changes that had contributed to the advancement of women. Yemen's Constitution guaranteed women equal rights with men, and women's equal participation in political decision-making was encouraged by such measures as the recent allocation of 15 per cent of seats in Parliament to women. There were two women ministers in the current Yemeni Government, and women served as deputy ministers, members of Parliament, judges, ambassadors, soldiers and police officers. Over a quarter of the Yemeni workforce was female, with notable annual increases in their employment in the fields of government, health and education.

29. Yemen would be submitting its sixth national report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2008. There were Government programmes to address women's poverty, violence against women and birth control. Maternal mortality had been reduced, and the Ministry of Health had issued a decision

prohibiting female circumcision at Government health facilities. Education was being made available to women as never before, in the hope of remedying the effects of denial of access to education in the past. A campaign to limit early marriage had resulted in steps being taken to raise the minimum age of marriage for girls to 18. She wished to express the steadfast support of Yemeni women for Palestinian women who were being deprived of their rights as a result of the Israeli occupation. Development, peace and security could not be achieved without equal rights for women.

30. **Ms. Sipraseuth** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that her Government had spared no effort to promote gender equality with the support of the Lao Women's Union. It encouraged the women's movement to play an active role in national defence and socio-economic development and created an enabling environment to improve women's access to education, health-care services, vocational training and job opportunities. Lao women had achieved continued progress and were now a significant force in national development. They participated in high-level decision-making at the local and national levels, with women now accounting for 23 per cent of deputies in the current term of the National Assembly, compared to only 9.4 per cent in the previous one. Significantly, the Vice-President of the National Assembly was a woman from the Hmong ethnic group.

31. The National Commission for the Advancement of Women had helped the Government formulate a national strategy for the advancement of women for 2005 to 2010, which focused on enhancing women's participation in the implementation of the National Growth and Poverty-Eradication Strategy, promoting women's education, health and participation in decision-making and strengthening women's organizations. Her delegation wished to express its gratitude for the invaluable assistance provided by friendly countries and international organizations for national development and the advancement of women.

32. **Ms. Gendi** (Egypt) said that efforts to assist women in attaining their legitimate rights must be redoubled. That encompassed the comprehensive empowerment of women, which entailed not only equal opportunities for employment, salary, and rights, but also freedom from poverty and disease, total integration into the development process and into the fight against discrimination and racism on the basis of belief or faith. Her Government expressed its support for the implementation of the Secretary-General's recommendation on achieving gender equality and women's empowerment through gender-related United Nations bodies.

33. Issues relating to women, within the Organization or outside it, should not be limited to addressing deprivation of rights. Rather, the development-related aspects of women's rights should also be considered, within the framework of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Women were the nucleus of the family and thus of society, and they played a key role in sustainable development, international peace and security, and the development of respect for human rights, particularly in armed conflicts and under foreign occupation.

34. Egypt believed in women's role in development and was striving to realize women's political, economic and social empowerment, as women's development was a prerequisite for the comprehensive development and modernization of society. Institutions had been established to accomplish those goals, chief among them the National Council for Women. Also, a centre had been established to train women to participate in political life. Her Government was keen to integrate women's issues into all related public policies and strategies. Women's empowerment required the involvement of all government organs and institutions, as well as that of civil society.

35. Egypt had included the social dimension of gender in its national five-year plan (2002-2007). Her Government had also begun integrating gender issues and the fulfilment of women's developmental needs into its six-year national plan for economic and social development (2007-2012) after discussions with rural and urban women, in a bottom-up participatory decentralized approach. That allowed for bridging economic, social and cultural gender gaps, especially in rural areas where males were dominant. Egypt had advocated the establishment of the Organization of Arab Women under the League of Arab States and had also planned the holding of high-level regional summits to discuss financing for development as it related to gender equality.

36. **Mr. Bonavia** (Malta) said that his delegation aligned itself with the statement made by the European Union, but wished to reiterate its view that any position taken or recommendations made regarding the

advancement of women should not create an obligation for any party to consider abortion as a legitimate form of reproductive health rights or services. The situation of both women and men in Malta had improved significantly thanks to the Government's continuous commitment to gender equality. The country had had legislation and national machinery in place since 2003 for the promotion and enforcement of gender equality. In 2006, legislation had been enacted on domestic violence, and a commission had been established to raise public awareness of the issue.

37. Malta also had standards for victim care facilities and practitioners and a comprehensive prevention and early intervention plan. Family friendly measures had been introduced, as had gender equality and work-life balance initiatives, inter alia within the civil service and judiciary. School textbooks had also been revised to eliminate gender bias, while harsher punishments had been introduced for trafficking in women and girls. Women had been appointed as judges and magistrates, and Malta had also appointed a female judge to the European Court of Justice. Meanwhile, an increasing majority of university students were female, including 57.4 per cent of graduates of the University of Malta in 2006. His country was committed to cooperating with the European Union and the wider international community for the advancement of women in all spheres.

38. **Ms. Tiendrébéogo** (Burkina Faso) said that a five-year national plan of action adopted in 2006 focused on enhancing women's participation in the country's social, economic, political and cultural development and ensuring the realization of all their rights. It sought to raise women's social status; promote their access to decision-making, education and training; improve mother-child health; combat female poverty through capacity-building and income-generating activities; and strengthen institutional mechanisms.

39. Burkina Faso had ratified several relevant international agreements including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which had been translated into the three main national languages. The Government continued to work towards implementation of General Assembly resolution 61/143 on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and was also working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to raise public awareness of the issue and to assist victims.

40. At the Pan-African Women's Day held on 31 July 2007, Burkina Faso had stressed the importance of women's entrepreneurship and the vital role of women in regional integration. The occasion had allowed women entrepreneurs and leaders to build on lessons learned, identify the main obstacles to women's advancement in Burkina Faso and propose new strategies. Three of Burkina Faso's 13 governors were women, as well as five of the country's 34 ministers and 17 of a total of 111 deputies. A quota had also been introduced to raise women's representation in the National Assembly.

41. Thanks to efforts made under the country's 10-year education strategy, some 61 per cent of girls were now enrolled in primary school. At the secondary and higher levels, the enrolment rates were 14 and 12 per cent respectively. Some 195 women had been trained in butter and soap production, and women's literacy had been strengthened with the establishment of 22 literacy centres and the organization of a public awareness and funding campaign. A review of national progress on women's issues had also been carried out to mark the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Ministry for the Advancement of Women. Encouraging results had been achieved thanks in part to development assistance, but poverty, inadequate resources, lack of education and low awareness among women of their rights continued to hamper national efforts. However, the Government was committed to creating an enabling environment for the advancement of women.

42. **Ms. Radu** (Moldova) said that, despite the importance of empowering women in advancing development, reducing poverty and guaranteeing the basic human right of gender equality, discrimination against women and girls remained the most pervasive and persistent form of inequality. The Constitution of Moldova and other normative acts stipulated the equality of all its citizens before the law. The Government had adopted a range of national plans and programmes and established institutional monitoring mechanisms to promote advancement of women, in the areas of achieving gender equality, combating human trafficking, ensuring equal work opportunities and providing assistance in reproductive health care and family planning.

43. However, as more needed to be done, her Government had established the Commission on Gender Equality. Aware of the importance of combating and preventing domestic violence, it had also approved a law on domestic violence in 2006. Migration was a significant process in society. However, migrant women were disproportionately affected by a number of risks arising from their mobility. Moldova relied heavily on remittances from migrant workers, which accounted for 27 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) — second-highest percentage in the world.

44. Often, migrant women either became victims of trafficking or were forced to endure poor working conditions and physical or psychological abuse. In order to protect the rights of migrants and victims of human trafficking, Moldova had signed and ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings in May 2006. Moldova supported the idea of strengthening the United Nations gender architecture, as well as the establishment of a new gender entity that could harmonize the normative and analytical functions of the existing system with the technical, policy-setting role.

45. **Ms. Knight** (United States of America) outlined a number of recent Government activities on behalf of women worldwide. The Women Leaders' Working Group had met that September, bringing together women ministers, heads of State, ambassadors and chief executives officers to address issues relating to the advancement of women. Working Group members had proposed several initiatives, urging the Government of Burma to resume a path of dialogue and democracy and addressing issues such as poverty, trafficking in persons, women's situations in post-conflict societies in Africa, and women's political participation.

46. Her Government had focused on two aspects of violence against women that demanded greater attention: forced and early marriage, and sexual violence in conflict situations, including State use of rape to achieve military and political objectives. The United States had introduced a draft resolution that called for action by States, the United Nations system and civil society actors including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to address the problem.

47. Since 2005, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) had been implementing the Combating Violence Against Women Initiative, which had provided $16 million to address sexual violence in Darfur. Since 2001, the USAID Victims of Torture Fund had contributed more than $5 million to treat survivors of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The United States Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief prioritized reducing violence and discrimination against women. The Plan mandated that the United States would support five high-priority gender strategies: increasing gender equity in HIV/AIDS activities and services; reducing violence and coercion; addressing male norms and behaviours; increasing women's legal protection; and increasing women's access to income and productive resources.

48. The United States Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration had been at the forefront of protecting and assisting refugees and victims of conflict, particularly refugee women and girls. Her Government had also increased funding to combat maternal mortality and obstetric fistula. With regard to trafficking in persons, there was already widespread awareness of trafficking for sexual exploitation, but many foreign Governments did not have the means to address trafficking for labour exploitation. The 2005 reauthorization of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act had stressed the need to intensify the focus on trafficking for forced labour purposes.

49. **Mr. Tun** (Myanmar), speaking on a point of order, said that his country's official name, Myanmar, should be used in references to it.

50. **Mr. Chidumo** (Mozambique) said that his country had adopted political, social and economic frameworks, in accordance with the Beijing Declaration, in order to protect and promote women's rights, one of the Government's top priorities. The Constitution of Mozambique provided for equal rights between women and men. Further, the country was signatory to several regional and international conventions and initiatives that aimed to promote equal rights between women and men, among them the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. His Government had presented its second periodic report, in fulfilment of its obligations under the Convention in May of that year. Mozambique had taken note of the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and was committed to implementing them.

51. Mozambique had also established various entities to strengthen institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, including a National Council for the Advancement of Women and a Gender Coordination Group. A draft law against domestic violence had been drawn up, and police officers were being trained in women's rights and in providing assistance to victims of violence. More needed to be done, but steady progress was being made. Mozambican women were contributing to national development and becoming more prominent players in the political, economic and social spheres.

52. **Ms. Eilon-Shahar** (Israel) said that, 60 years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaimed gender equality as an international standard, it was unfortunate that so much remained to be done. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remained a touchstone in discussions of women's development, along with the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, which called for the use of time-bound, measurable targets to assess progress.

53. Across much of the globe, the participation of women in the electoral process and in government lagged far behind that of men, a situation that should be addressed with urgency. National and international financing for development should acknowledge a gender perspective in real terms, through gender-specific projects or by engaging authorities to encourage women's participation in development. Israel's International Centre for Cooperation continued to play a part in the movement towards global gender equality, through activities in 108 countries.

54. Women in rural areas faced particular difficulties. Women were often the centre of family life in developing regions, caring for children and the elderly while producing the majority of staple crops to feed the family and bring in income. Yet, in spite of that central position, they lagged behind men in terms of wages, equality before the law and land rights. The major disparities between countries and regions in indicators of women's health and well-being painted a picture of their unequal power. Availability of health care for women was doubly important because they were generally the primary caregivers for young children.

55. Israel had enshrined the ideal of women's equality in its declaration of independence nearly 60 years earlier. Equality remained a work in progress, but the issue was at the centre of the national agenda. The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, operating within the Prime Minister's Office, had spearheaded a campaign to combat violence against women. New legislation on human trafficking provided for stiffer sentences and ensured that trafficked persons were treated as victims entitled to free legal counsel and shelter. The law also stipulated that funds confiscated from traffickers would be allocated for victim rehabilitation and protection.

56. Her country lay in a region that remained in turmoil, and women were its primary victims. In that respect, Israel was implementing various provisions of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, and hoped that the increased role of women in negotiations to end conflict and in post-conflict peacebuilding would foster greater understanding and reconciliation. Women in government could be strong advocates for the rights of other women, and women who voted could put them there. Israel had no illusions that achieving gender equality would be simple. Cultural inertia and competing priorities tended to sideline the issue. But equality was a right among men and women, rich and poor, in developed and developing nations. The international community should demand no less.

57. **Mr. Margarian** (Armenia) said that his Government was implementing a national programme for the advancement of women based on its Constitution, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action. The programme was intended to extend equal rights and opportunities, improve women's social and economic status, combat violence against women and trafficking and contribute to Armenia's poverty eradication strategy. The election laws had recently been changed to require one out of ten candidates on party lists to be women. In the May 2007 parliamentary elections, the number of women members of Parliament had doubled, from 6 to 12; although the number remained small, it signalled a trend that should continue. The pace of change was slower in the Executive Branch, with just one woman Minister. Women had reached virtual gender parity in the middle levels of the civil service, however, and were highly active in non-governmental organizations and civil society.

58. **Mr. Al-Saif** (Kuwait) said that he was pleased to note that women in Kuwait had participated in

elections in 2006, and would be granted full political rights. Furthermore, his Government had withdrawn its reservation to article 17 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. He did not claim that there were no shortcomings in the situation of women in Kuwait, but women did hold high-level posts in the Government, including those of two Cabinet Ministers, as well as positions on municipal councils and in the diplomatic service. Conflict was the main cause of violence against women, and special attention must be paid to women living under occupation, in the Syrian Arab Golan and other places in the world. Occupation must be ended in order to prevent the hatred that it created.

59. **Ms. Al-Shehail** (Saudi Arabia) said that her Government was taking measures for the advancement of women based on the principles of Sharia, which granted rights to women. In fact, the Bill of Rights in Saudi Arabia emanated directly from the Koran. Her Government attached great importance to the social and economic aspects of the family, in which women played a major role. Government ministries and the private sector were involved in women's employment schemes. Women were also making progress in education; in fact, 57 per cent of graduates were women, which guaranteed their increased participation in society and the labour market. Women represented 14 per cent of the overall workforce; their proportions were 30 per cent of the workforce in the public sector and 84 per cent in the education sector.

60. Saudi Arabia had signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2000, thereby demonstrating its agreement with the provisions of the Convention, and she reaffirmed its attachment to the provisions on women's human rights that it contained. Lastly, a number of women's development projects were under way, as the cornerstone of efforts to reinforce the status of women.

61. **Mr. Kleijssen** (Council of Europe) said that there had been a number of developments in the Council of Europe in the field of combating trafficking in persons, violence against women and the protection and promotion of the rights of the child. In 2006, the 47-nation Council had launched a campaign to combat trafficking in human beings highlighting measures to prevent that new form of slavery, protect the human rights of victims and prosecute traffickers. It also aimed at promoting the signature and ratification of the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings for its early entry into force. No country was capable of defeating trafficking alone; the Convention provided a new tool to prevent and combat it more effectively.

62. It was impossible to speak of true equality between women and men as long as gender-based violence continued. Figures on the prevalence of violence were sobering: one fifth to one quarter of all women had experienced physical violence at least once during their adult lives, and more than one tenth had suffered sexual violence involving the use of force. The majority of such violent acts were carried out by men in their immediate social environment, most often by partners or former partners. Over the past decade the Council had taken a series of initiatives to improve the protection of women, including Recommendation 5 (2002) of the Committee of Ministers, which spelled out the obligation of States to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence, whether perpetrated by the State or private persons, and to provide protection for victims. Custom, religion or tradition could never be an excuse to permit violence against women. Sadly, such violence remained widespread in Europe, and was too often explained away as a family matter beyond the reach of public intervention. The Council's campaign to combat violence against women aimed at raising awareness and breaking the silence surrounding such abuse.

63. For the Council, the protection of children from all forms of violence, especially sexual violence, was a top priority. The July 2007 adoption of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse was a major step forward in the prevention of sexual offences against children, prosecution of perpetrators of such crimes and protection of victims. The Convention also addressed the issues of the "grooming" of children for sexual purposes and sex tourism. He hoped that many non-member States of the Council would be interested in signing the Convention as well.

64. **Mr. Heller** (Mexico) said that, although Mexico had made significant progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Declaration, violence against women was a major obstacle to their full implementation, especially in marginalized sectors of society. Therefore, one of the keys to combating violence was the strengthening of education programmes from a gender perspective,

along with increased effectiveness in the justice system. In terms of increasing participation in decision-making, it was essential for women from such vulnerable groups as migrants, indigenous communities and those living in extreme poverty to be given greater visibility. His Government was thus joining other members of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in observing the World Rural Woman's Day on 15 October.

65. Mexico firmly believed in the relationship between its multilateral commitments and domestic programmes to guarantee women's rights. The first case to be considered under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had, in fact, originated in Mexico. It had also recently adopted a number of laws in the area of violence against women and equal rights. Lastly, Mexico had expressed its concerns on a number of occasions regarding duplication of work, inefficiency and lack of coordination among the bodies involved in gender issues within the United Nations system. It urged a review of the existing gender architecture in order to make it more effective in carrying out its very important work.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.